

Fighting Graffiti

A few months ago, Chula Vista rolled out a new secret weapon in its battle against graffiti. It's a custom -built high tech 17- foot van outfitted with equipment that allows a specially trained team of City employees to mix and match paint colors on the spot. That means no more patchwork effects on buildings, walls or fences; the Graffiti Removal Color Matching Van and its assigned crew have the capability of whipping up just the right shade of paint to blend with the original color of any surface. The effect is a seamless surface with no telltale signs of graffiti.

Public Works employees have been trained to operate the van-- the first of its kind in the region. On board is an amazing instrument called a spectrophotometer-- a laser shooting, hand-held Palm Pilot/scanner that "reads" the color of a surface the crew intends to match. When crewmembers upload the information from the spectrophotometer to a computer housed in the truck, they're offered several formulas. They pick the best option and start mixing colors.

The possibilities are mind-boggling. Before the new truck went into service, City crews had only five stock colors in their anti-graffiti arsenal. Now, they have the ability to mix more than three thousand different colors.

Inside the truck is a self contained mini home improvement store, with a 12 -canister tinting dispenser, paint shaker, portable and truck-mounted airless paint sprayers, sinks, enough storage cabinets for 50 gallons of paint, a label maker, GPS digital camera, and a dual monitor PC. Color tints with names like thalo blue, red oxide, raw umber and magenta, are carefully measured and mixed with one gallon cans of base paint to achieve the perfect match. The final step is spraying or rolling on the custom color.

Property owners are praising this new and effective weapon against graffiti. "Everybody is really happy," observed Junior Llamas, a member of the crew. "Not only are we removing graffiti, we're making the City more beautiful." When the crew moves on to another location, they leave behind the can of custom paint for property owners in case vandals strike again.

A global positioning system onboard the new van accurately pinpoints and tracks graffiti work locations, which are entered into a database. The paint crew also sends photographs of the vandalism to police who may use the evidence when prosecuting taggers.

"Graffiti is a major plague that is costing big money, nationwide," according to Public Works Manager, Ted Larson, who oversees the new unit. Larson says the arrival of the van focuses attention on a decades-old problem that takes a toll on any city's identity. "I'm hoping this new approach to fighting graffiti translates into a community awareness

tool. Hopefully, this new piece of equipment will help restore neighborhood pride and inspire business owners and residents alike to get involved.” To report graffiti, please call the City’s graffiti hotline at (619) 691-5198.